

Acid Rain
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In recent months a new maxim has charmed many political commentators: the federal government will only address problems that have matured into crises. If true, a solution to our nation's acid rain problem may be at hand. For among both scientists and Congressmen, a new reality is emerging that recognizes acid rain as a national problem in need of a national solution.

Rainfall as acidic as vinegar is falling in Maryland, as it is in virtually every other state, corrupting our natural resources--lakes, farmlands, and forests--and eating away at our buildings, automobiles, and monuments.

Even worse, scientists now suspect a direct threat to our health from acid rain--which is formed when sulfuric and nitrogen oxides are emitted into the atmosphere and converted into sulfuric and nitric acids. These acids descend upon us in the form of rain, fog, or snow, adding poisonous metals to our drinking water with unknown results. Some studies even suggest that acid rain may be linked to Alzheimer's disease, a form of dementia caused by the degeneration of brain cells.

With the entire nation having a stake in correcting this devastating problem, why has the federal government been unable to adopt legislation to deal with it?

To begin with, for the past three years the Reagan administration has refused to face up to the problem, refusing even to admit that it exists. When Ann Gorsuch Burford was administrator of the Environmental Protection Agency and James Watt was Secretary of the Interior, the administration pressed for further study despite the overwhelming evidence pointing to the need for pollutant controls.

Now that further studies have occurred and the scientific debate about the cause of acid rain is closed, the Reagan administration continues to drag its feet by claiming that control measures are too costly and regionally divisive.

It is clear the only hope for acid rain legislation is if Congress initiates, develops, and forces the administration to accept a responsible and comprehensive control program.

Congress' job will undoubtedly be easier now that the National Academy of Sciences has reported that the only way to curb acid rain is to impose tighter controls on the pollutants caused by power plants,

cars, and trucks. But the administration and opponents of acid rain control are able to take advantage of the disagreements which still dominate the questions of how much control and which form of control.

These disagreements are due to the expense of controlling power-plant pollutants, whether by using "scrubber" technologies that remove pollutants or by prohibiting the use of high-sulfur coal as fuel. Opponents have made much of the economic argument that controls will cause an unacceptable number of lost jobs or equally unacceptable utility rate increases.

To deal with these arguments, Rep. Gerry Sikorski (D-Minn.) and I sought to devise a legislative approach that would meet the national goal of reducing acid rain without causing widespread unemployment or large rate increases. The result is our National Acid Deposition Control Act, which proposes that sulfur dioxide emissions be reduced by 10 million tons and nitrogen oxide emissions by 4 million tons. These reductions would virtually eliminate the problem.

To reach this goal, the 50 largest emission sources among coal-burning power plants would be required to install scrubber technology by 1990. This would reduce sulfur dioxide levels by 7 million tons. At the same time, it would preserve the jobs of 80,000 coal miners in the East and Midwest and the jobs of an additional 200,00 workers in related industries. In addition, thousands of jobs will be created in states such as Maryland where the pollution control industry is located.

The states in need of additional control would be required to pursue the remaining 3 million ton goal for sulfur dioxide reduction in proportion to the amount of emissions from plants within their borders. These reductions would be required by 1993 and could be met by scrubbing, fuel switching or other methods. Funds would be available to help defray the costs of technology. States would not be required to obtain costly and possibly unavailable offsets for growth. New factories and power plants would still be required to meet tight control standards.

The 4 million ton reduction in nitrogen oxide would be accomplished by strict controls on emissions from new trucks and power plants.

As for financing, a fee of one mill--one-tenth of a cent--would be imposed on most electrical generation nationwide during the next decade. This would cost the average residential household about 50 cents to \$1 a month. The fee would help finance the cost of installing scrubbers on power plants, thus preventing huge rate hikes in any one region. But the areas that pollute the most would still bear the principal cost burden of clean-up.

In taking a national approach, this bill is the only proposal to curb acid rain that has a real chance of passage. Once this is achieved, it will boost our chances of moving ahead with other Clean Air Act amendments and fine-tuning changes to increase the law's

simplicity and effectiveness. We will then be able to end the Environmental Protection Agency's shameful record of ignoring cancer-causing air pollutants.

We can expect the Reagan administration to oppose the legislation every step of the way. Those in the administration most against acid rain control will join with the utilities and some mining interests in an attempt to divide the country along regional lines and to persuade people that they should not have to help pay for controlling acid rain.

There is, of course, nothing new about spreading the cost of alleviating a localized problem, whether it is pollution control, highway construction, harbor projects or bailing out a troubled industry.

And despite the administration's strong opposition, H.R. 3400 has already attracted over 100 cosponsors in the House, from all regions of the country. Even Bill Ruckelshaus, the new head of the EPA, has said that acid rain is a national problem requiring a national fund to help pay for the clean-up. The bipartisan effort to control acid rain will march on with or without President Reagan.

Acid rain, no respecter of state lines, and with an economic fallout affecting Marylanders, as well as Vermonters and Californians, is a classic national problem. We simply cannot wait any longer to enact a comprehensive control strategy.